

even though we are the world's best customers.

Later on tonight, we will be talking about that issue and whether or not there is a way that we, here in the House, can exercise the will of the people and get something done on that issue before we go home for the break.

BEWARE THE GHOSTS OF CHRISTMAS PAST

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. GREEN) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. GREEN of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I want to associate myself with the remarks of both my colleague, the gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. ROSS) and also my colleague, the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. BROWN) in the concern about what happened in the Medicare conference committee on prescription drugs.

It is sad that we came here to talk about a prescription drug plan for seniors, but we are actually going to take it away from them in the process. But the reason I am here tonight, Mr. Speaker, is to talk about the problem we have in our country with the unemployment.

Mr. Speaker, as we embark on what we hope will be our last week in sessions before the holiday recess, I rise to warn my colleagues about the ghost of Christmas Past, the economic mistakes that Congress and this administration have made on the eve of past holidays. Let us take time to learn from those mistakes and not recreate them.

I can say with confidence that each Member of this Chamber was pleased to hear the impressive economic growth figures for July through September. Over the past 3 years, this country has suffered through some of the worst economic conditions since the Great Depression, and it was certainly uplifting to see the reports of 7.2 percent growth in gross domestic product. While we remain optimistic about an economic rebound for the country, I, however, caution my colleagues against relying on the sustainability of this economic growth.

Economic indicators show that these figures were the result of consumer spending and a tremendous boost in the housing market. Yet with consumer spending outpacing consumer income, it is clear that spending cannot fuel our economic growth indefinitely. Let us remember our reaction to similar news in 2002. After months of job losses and a dismal economic growth, the country boasted growth of 5 percent in the first quarter of 2002. Despite our optimism, however, job losses continued and the next quarter yielded a 1.3 percent growth.

This time last year we were celebrating third quarter growth of 4 percent, and like today, entering the holidays with high hopes. Needless to say, our hopes were dashed and the country has since endured the worst job condi-

tions in 20 years. These are our ghosts of Christmas Past, the flurry of mistaken optimism that failed to deliver on its economic promises.

Like the optimism of Christmas Past, this recent economic growth belies the fact that our manufacturing sector has cut jobs for the 39th straight month. My State of Texas, with 1.6 million lost jobs, ranks third in the amount of manufacturing jobs lost since September of 2000. While the country may be making modest gains in employment, 6 percent of America's workers are still unemployed. Almost one-quarter of these 8.8 million people have been out of work for more than 6 months. These figures do not even count the discouraged workers, 462,000 Americans who have completely given up looking for jobs and are no longer on our unemployment rolls.

Fortunately, many former unemployed workers have found jobs, but we must examine the kind of jobs they are turning to; 4.8 million Americans work part-time, but only because they cannot find full-time work, and many of these workers are former engineers, former computer technicians who previously earned up to \$60,000 a year, but now must settle for \$7.50 an hour at a retail store.

No amount of economic statistics can hide the realities that these people face. Our unemployed workers are hurting. Our unemployed families are draining their savings to survive. And this Congress holds in its hands the ability to extend their unemployment benefits.

Let me remind my colleagues that the holiday season is the time of the year when we give thanks for our blessings and extend our hearts to the less fortunate. Last year, that important lesson must have been lost on the majority's leadership, because Congress packed up for the year without extending unemployment benefits.

That is right. Congress left town to enjoy the holidays and in doing so, left America's unemployed workers in the cold.

Mr. Speaker, this year is no different. Unfortunately, if we do not act soon, the Ghost of Christmas Past will be forced to remind us of the tremendous mistake we made by withholding these benefits last year. Even Scrooge learned from his mistakes.

I implore the administration and my colleagues to let us take a hard, realistic look at our economy and make sure that any recovery helps the Americans who have been most hurt by this downturn, and above all, let us pass the extension of the temporary unemployment benefits before we adjourn for the holidays.

It is the right thing to do for our economy and for America's unemployed.

IRAQ PROPAGANDA CAMPAIGN

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentle-

woman from California (Ms. WOOLSEY) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. WOOLSEY. Mr. Speaker, the Coalition Provisional Authority which is the title of the American authority overseeing the reconstruction of Iraq, and the Bush administration which created it, are openly dissatisfied with the stories the media has chosen to broadcast regarding the United States' role in Iraq. In fact, they say the news media too often covers the negative events that occur in Iraq, but rarely reports any positive happenings there. They even pressured reporters to find the so-called good news in Iraq or lose access in an attempt to manipulate the stories coming out of Iraq.

Let us keep in mind that over 400 American soldiers have died in Iraq since the start of the war in March. That is more than 11 brave young men and women killed each week. It is hard to find the good news when our sons and daughters keep coming home in body bags. And it is exceptionally insulting to the families of these victims to complain about media bias at the same time four helicopters have been destroyed by enemy fire over the last 2 weeks.

The situation in Iraq is getting less safe for our troops, not safer. In addition to the 404 troops killed in action, over 2,000 have been wounded and another 7,000 have been evacuated for noncombat medical conditions. And yet, the President continues to complain about media bias. So what has the White House decided to do about the quote/unquote "unfair reporting" by the media?

Why, bypass that very media, of course. The President's handlers plan to influence public perception by creating a government-run broadcast operation to provide American news agencies unfettered access to the real stories in Iraq. This broadcasting system which the administration unofficially refers to as C-SPAN Bagdad will run via satellite 24 hours a day. C-SPAN Bagdad. More like American Al-Jazeera, the media giant that reports to the Arab world in a very biased fashion.

The White House is increasingly aware, of course, that President Bush's fate in the upcoming 2004 election is directly linked to the progress of the war in Iraq. So bypassing the third-party national media allows the Bush administration to mold public perception of the war effort. I think our country's founders would be ashamed to know that at the same time hundreds of our soldiers and thousands of Iraqi civilians are dying, President Bush is thinking about the chances for reelection. That is nothing short of appalling.

But equally appalling is that the American taxpayer will finance this shameful propaganda machine. That is right. The administration is directing money from the \$87 billion emergency supplemental spending bill that Congress approved last month to help pay

for the new Bush media machine. This is not emergency spending. This is campaign spending. This is propaganda spending. Instead of trying to win the hearts and minds of Americans through propaganda, President Bush should be trying to win the hearts and minds of the insurgents who are making Iraq less stable. He should show them a United States to which burgeoning democracies like Iraq can aspire, a United States that would be a democratic model for the rest of the world. I daresay an autocratic state-sponsored propaganda campaign is not a part of this model.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from California (Ms. SOLIS) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Ms. SOLIS addressed the House. Her remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

TENTATIVE AGREEMENT ON MEDICARE CONFERENCE REPORT

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. PALLONE) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. PALLONE. Mr. Speaker, I rise this evening to express my extreme disappointment regarding the tentative agreement that has been reached by the Republicans in Congress with regard to Medicare and prescription drugs.

Mr. Speaker, the source of my frustration stems from the fact that this agreement is not good public policy. It is not good for seniors or any Medicare consumer and it does nothing to reduce the cost of soaring prescription drugs.

What this bill does, simply stated, is it kills the Medicare program and, in the process, shores up hundreds of billions of dollars of funding for the HMO industry and for the name-brand pharmaceutical industry. If this so-called deal is enacted into law, make no mistake about it, the Medicare program will be privatized. Medicare, as we know it today, will be turned into a voucher system and seniors will be forced into HMO's.

Republicans are trying to fool us into believing that their privatization provisions are merely a demonstration project or a test, but nothing could be further from the truth.

Mr. Speaker, the Republican Medicare provisions are unacceptable because they have nothing to do with prescription drugs. The "demo" goes way beyond the scope of providing seniors with prescription drug coverage, and, in fact, aims to bankrupt seniors, denying them their right to adequate health care under Medicare, and ultimately forcing them into HMOs because they can no longer afford Medicare.

This is exactly where the insurance companies come in to get their big pay-off because greater risk and cost are shifted to senior citizens.

Furthermore, the provisions in the Medicare agreement that deal with prescription drug coverage are completely inadequate in terms of benefit structure. We are talking about a \$275 deductible, a \$35 monthly premium, 75-25 coverage, in other words, 75 percent paid by the Federal Government, 25 percent by the senior to the first \$2,200 and no assistance until \$3,600, at which point, the catastrophic is reached. So there is a huge doughnut hole; basically, between \$2,200 and \$3,600, in assistance, seniors get nothing. This means that seniors will have to pay nearly \$2,600 before the government pays for all drug costs.

Twenty million seniors or half of all seniors will be paying premiums year-round but would have no coverage for part of the year due to this large gap or doughnut hole in the coverage.

Now, the combination of this insufficient benefit combined with watered-down generic provisions, watered-down reimportation provisions, and the prohibition of the Medicare Administrator to negotiate lower drug prices brings me to my point that this Medicare final agreement is a giveaway to the name-brand pharmaceutical industry.

Mr. Speaker, there are so many fundamental problems with this upcoming Medicare agreement beyond what I have discussed tonight. There is no Medicare fallback in this bill that is favorable to seniors. We expect 2 to 3 million retirees to have their coverage dropped. Ten million, or one out of four, seniors will be forced to pay more for Medicare or to join an HMO. Low-income seniors are not financially protected and will be subject to an assets test for the first time in Medicare history. And the Medicare Part B will rise for the first time in 12 years. Means testing will be implemented in the Medicare program for the first time in its history, and tax sheltered accounts for the wealthy are going to be part of this bill, even though it is not really a Medicare bill.

Mr. Speaker, the list of problems in this so-called Medicare agreement is overwhelming, and I really do not know how the Republicans or groups like the AARP or the President and others who have endorsed this agreement can live with their deceit and ill will against America's seniors.

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UNDERMINING THE WHOLE CONCEPT OF MEDICARE

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. TANCREDI). Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Washington (Mr. McDERMOTT) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. McDERMOTT. Mr. Speaker, I want to associate myself with the remarks of the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. PALLONE). This week is one of the most important weeks that I have seen in the 16 years I have been in the Congress because we are dealing with

an issue that is about the question of what is in the common good.

We have no problem in this country believing that fire departments and police departments and road systems and schools are issues of the common good. We all pay our taxes. We all get benefits from them, and we have since 1964 had a program in this country called Medicare which was a program in which everybody put their money and people over the age of 65 took out their money to pay for health care benefits when they needed them. Everybody got the same thing everywhere in the whole country.

But there have been people in this Congress who have always thought that the idea of doing something collectively was somehow, I do not know, socialism or something bad. I do not know. They believe that everybody should be individually responsible for themselves, that they should be on their own and that they should deal with these things in a market, like they were buying cars or buying refrigerators or television sets.

So we have a bill before us that is going to undo what we have had in this country for senior citizens for the last 38 years. They have been waiting. They have been trying to do this for 4 or 5 years.

I was on the Medicare commission. One of the Members of the other body and the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. DINGELL) of this body and I represented the Democrats on that commission, and we managed to hold off the disaster which is being foisted on the senior citizens and the country itself in the next week.

This attitude about the common good really began to be undermined under Mr. Reagan. It was his campaign slogan in 1980: Are you better off than you were 4 years ago? Not are "we" better off than we were 4 years ago, but are "you."

This bill is going to say we are going to guarantee a premium support to every senior citizen in this country; we are going to write them a check, \$5,900, \$6,000, \$6,300, whatever; and we are going to say now you, grandma, take that check out and find yourself an insurance company that will take care of what your needs are. You can stay in the program of Medicare as we know it, but since the healthy and the least sick will go out and find these good deals somewhere, who will be left in the regular program? The old and the sick.

The price per person is going to go up, so they are going to raise the premium on anybody who stays in the regular program. Is that thinking about the common good, that we are going to pick on the ones who are the old and the sick, and we are going to let the young and the healthy seniors go off and make a good deal somewhere? No, it is not. It is wrong, it is un-American, and it is undermining the whole concept of Medicare.

The idea that all seniors put their money into the pot, nobody sits around